

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A system and method for assessing and affecting the state of affairs within and among given organizations and communities with respect to given issues or objectives.
2. A system and method which makes use of “narrative patterns” to assess and affect the state of affairs within and among given organizations and communities with respect to given issues or objectives.
3. The system and method of claim 2, further comprising the phases of:
 - a) initiation, in which various preparatory, selective, exploratory and purpose-setting activities are carried out as needed;
 - b) elicitation, in which “narrative material” (“anecdotes” and “contextual material”) is collected from the given organizations or communities;
 - c) storage, in which the collected narrative material is indexed and arrayed in such a way as to be useful to the overall process;
 - d) “common sensemaking”, in which the given organizations or communities come to a collective understanding of patterns emergent in the collected narrative material which address the issues or objectives at hand;
 - e) option formation, in which various possibilities for appropriate response are identified;
 - f) option evaluation, in which the identified options are characterized, appraised and prioritized; and

g) response, in which an action is taken in order to affect the state of affairs.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the initiation phase includes initial collection of narrative material which informs the setting of purpose for the effort.

5. The method of claim 3, wherein the initiation phase includes the selection and education of co-discoverers, or members of the given organizations or communities who will participate in the elicitation of narrative material.

6. The method of claim 3, wherein the initiation phase includes the use of a plurality of information gathering activities such as interviews and social network analysis to inform the selection of participants and co-discoverers.

7. The method of claim 3, wherein the initiation phase includes the choice of a target mix of roles designed to maximize storytelling potential (e.g., novices and experts, users and support staff), which creates conditions for knowledge exchange greater than those that would be obtained by bringing together participants with other backgrounds.

8. The method of claim 3, wherein the initiation phase includes the holding of “covenanting” meetings in which issues, scope, purpose, and contributions are discussed and agreed upon by method practitioners, co-discoverers, sponsors, and other involved individuals and groups.

9. The method of claim 3, wherein the elicitation phase minimizes the collection of stories which exhibit camouflage behavior and conform to official scripts.

10. The method of claim 3, wherein the elicitation phase minimizes the collection of

non-meaningful narrative responses that typically result from poorly articulated instructions and popular misconceptions about narrative; these responses comprise opinions, lies, jokes, children's stories, and Hollywood stories.

11. The method of claim 3, wherein the elicitation phase integrates observation, interviewing, and group sessions as needed to provide a large, diverse, and representative narrative base with which to examine the given issues or objectives in the given organizations or communities.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein group sessions follow any of four distinct formats depending on the experience of facilitators, the time available, the completeness of outputs desired, and the purpose of the session, as follows:

- a) a "story circle" unstructured format in which skilled facilitators choose among several narrative techniques depending on the purpose and flow of the session;
- b) a "story roundtable" structured format in which unskilled facilitators guide participants in relating narratives while choosing "favorite" or "best" narratives;
- c) a "self-running" semi-structured format in which participants follow a game-like set of instructions (with printed and/or multimedia materials) and take part in various narrative activities, reporting their results with little or no facilitation; and
- d) a "virtual story gathering" online format in which participants relate narratives and discuss issues using electronic means, integrating synchronous and asynchronous and perhaps anonymous communications.

13. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of "dit spinning" activities, in which participants tell escalating "fish tale" narratives.

14. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of alternative history activities, in which participants construct alternative anecdotes arising from turning points identified in existing anecdotes.

15. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of shifting character or context activities, in which participants alter significant aspects of character, setting, plot or other story elements and tell or retell anecdotes from different perspectives.

16. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of archetypal story elicitation activities, in which participants tell or retell anecdotes using archetypal elements such as fictional characters.

17. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of story construction activities, in which participants construct stories of various forms (e.g., fables, myths) using anecdotes as source material and according to purposeful templates.

18. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of role playing activities, in which participants act out the parts of characters in anecdotes or constructed stories.

19. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of metaphorical elicitation activities, in which participants tell or retell narratives using altered metaphorical contexts.

20. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of

best or worst event identification activities, in which participants tell or retell narratives that feature high or low points in a series of historical events.

21. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of event or situation drawing activities, in which participants draw conceptual images of events, characters, archetypes, situations, and the like.

22. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of actor training activities, in which participants instruct actors in how to play out characters in anecdotes or constructed stories.

23. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story circle sessions include the use of cartoonist training activities, in which participants instruct cartoonists in drawing conceptual images of events, characters, archetypes, situations, and the like.

24. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story roundtable sessions rely on some combination of two or more of the following aspects which are specifically designed to maximize storytelling:

- a) the management of expectations;
- b) the mix of participants;
- c) the modeling of storytelling behavior;
- d) the combination of small and large group processes;
- e) the indirect suggestion of storytelling behavior; and
- f) explicit attention to group interactions.

25. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story roundtable sessions include the use

of preparatory materials which orient participants to the nature of the activities.

26. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story roundtable sessions include the special preparation of people who are participating in the roundtable but typically are seen by others as advice givers, in roles such as trainers and support staff.

27. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story roundtable sessions include the use of physical manipulables that stimulate discussion and provide a common ground for reference.

28. The method of claim 27, wherein physical manipulables include two or more of the following parts:

- a) “memory joggers”, or facts about the subject domain under discussion;
- b) “story starters”, or incomplete phrases that, when completed, start a story (such as “I remember the time when...”);
- c) “experience inflection points”, or roadblocks, breakthroughs, mysteries, misconceptions, and surprises.

29. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story roundtable sessions include the use of “gifting”, or the distribution of unexpected small rewards at the start of the session to engender a reciprocatory response.

30. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story roundtable sessions include the use of a “self-fulfilling prophecy”, or the combination of an observation that stories “tend to occur” with the avoidance of direct requests for storytelling, in order to create a natural environment for spontaneous storytelling.

31. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story roundtable sessions include the use

of a “modeled story”, or an example story told to engender natural storytelling.

32. The method of claim 31, wherein the modeled story is chosen by a two-step process, the steps comprising:

- a) the identification of characteristics required for the modeled story to be instructive, exemplary, engaging, and conducive to follow-up storytelling; and
- b) the selection of the modeling story exclusively by the facilitator who is to tell it in the story roundtable so that it can be imbued with personal meaning.

33. The method of claims 31 or 32, wherein the modeled story is practiced and developed by the facilitator who is to tell it in the story roundtable in various venues so that it becomes a successful catalyst for group storytelling.

34. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story roundtable sessions include the use of “cover”, which is background noise, music or conversation which creates a “cocktail party atmosphere” within which small groups are more likely to fall into spontaneous storytelling.

35. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein story roundtable sessions include the use of a “preparation trick”, in which small groups of people are asked to tell each other stories in order to choose a “best” or “most interesting” narrative, but the real purpose of the small-group work is the collection of spontaneous stories that arise before consideration of the “quality” of stories entrains the outcome of the exercise.

36. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein self-running sessions include the use of “concurrent streams” of explanation at different levels, so that participants can elect to

receive more or less instruction as they carry out the activities.

37. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein self-running sessions include the use of “multi-perspective games” which enhance multiple perspective taking and avoid entrainment and groupthink.

38. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein self-running sessions include the use of “accumulation”, or the use of output from some group sessions in the input of other group sessions, in order to catalyze emergence of global patterns from many such sessions.

39. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein virtual story gatherings include the use of anonymity for safety in disclosure.

40. The method of claims 9 to 10 or 11, wherein virtual story gatherings include the use of multiple persona for safe experimentation and disclosure.

41. The method of claim 3, wherein the storage phase includes the indexing of narrative material by distinctions central to the elicitation and sensemaking phases (such as archetypes, metaphors, turning points, and the like).

42. The method of claim 3, wherein the storage phase includes the capability of multi-perspective viewing of the narrative material in relation to any of the important dimensions of sensemaking, either juxtaposed or sequential.

43. The method of claim 3, wherein the storage phase includes the assignment of relevance scores on important dimensions and selective viewing of items based on relevance to given

issues.

44. The method of claim 3, wherein the sensemaking phase includes the integration of participatory workshops including members of the given organization or community and isolated study by method practitioners and/or co-discoverers (all people contributing to sensemaking are termed “interpreters”).
45. The method of claim 3, wherein the sensemaking phase includes the interpretation of “narrated elements”, or those elements that relate to an anecdote’s form or structure.
46. The method of claim 45, wherein interpreted narrated elements may include w-fragments, or who, what, where, when, and (less frequently) why.
47. The method of claims 45 or 46, wherein interpreted narrated elements may include story feature elements, or portions of anecdotes conforming to standard narrative plot structures.
48. The method of claim 3, wherein the sensemaking phase includes the interpretation of “knowledge elements”, or aspects of told anecdotes that relate to knowledge and decision making as it relates to the issues and objectives at hand.
49. The method of claim 48, wherein interpreted knowledge elements may include “knowledge disclosure points”, or decisions, judgments, problem resolutions and learning points.
50. The method of claims 49 or 50, wherein interpreted knowledge elements may include

“ASHEN components”, or artifacts, skills, heuristics, experience, and natural talent.

51. The method of claims 48, 49 or 50, wherein interpreted knowledge elements may include “experience inflection points”, or roadblocks, breakthroughs, mysteries, misconceptions, and surprises.

52. The method of claim 3, wherein the sensemaking phase includes the interpretation of “narration elements”, or observations about the context of storytelling exchanges.

53. The method of claim 52, wherein interpreted narration elements may include narrative affect elements, or aspects of the anecdote’s impact on its teller and audience.

54. The method of claims 52 or 53, wherein interpreted narration elements may include narrative community elements, or the roles of anecdotes in the community.

55. The method of claim 3, wherein the sensemaking phase includes the interpretation of “emergent patterns”, or constellations above the level of any one anecdote that emerge during consideration of the body of anecdotes as a whole.

56. The method of claim 55, wherein interpreted emergent patterns may include “archetypes”, or sets of rules, values, beliefs and other attributes which represent extreme characterizations of significant cultural forces within the community.

57. The method of claims 55 or 56, wherein interpreted emergent patterns may include “myth subjects”, or entities (typically people or groups) around which myths persist in the given organization or community.

58. The method of claims 55, 56 or 57, wherein interpreted emergent patterns may include “organizing principles”, or simple unspoken rules which create emergent properties in the given organization or community.

59. The method of claim 3, wherein the sensemaking phase includes movement between two types of process:

- a) “focusing processes”, or processes that characterize individual collected or constructed items by looking into their structure and/or meaning in the particular; and
- b) “integrating processes”, or processes that repeatedly juxtapose elements in order to allow meaningful patterns to emerge.

60. The method of claim 59, wherein focusing processes include “attribute listing”, or the description of essential attributes of interpreted items.

61. The method of claims 59 or 60, wherein focusing processes include the ranking of items on predetermined or emergent scales.

62. The method of claim 59, wherein integrating processes include the sorting of items into predetermined categories.

63. The method of claim 59, wherein integrating processes include “clustering”, or the classification of items with no a priori categories.

64. The method of claim 59, wherein integrating processes include the construction of

“integration artifacts”, or artifacts created for the purpose of sensemaking during integration of material, using predetermined structures and collected material.

65. The method of claim 64, wherein “sensemaking models”, or conceptual models whose use creates multi-perspective views that improve sensemaking, are used in the construction of integration artifacts.

66. The method of claims 64 or 65, wherein “attribute groupings”, or lists of attribute types that when brought together bring insights into larger patterns, are used in the construction of integration artifacts.

67. The method of claims 64, 65 or 66, wherein “narrative forms”, or structured story templates, are used in the construction of integration artifacts.

68. The method of claims 64 to 66 or 67, wherein the construction of integration artifacts may include the interaction of interpreters with cartoonists, actors, or other people skilled in creating representations, who draw or act out or otherwise represent the constructions iteratively while receiving feedback from interpreters.

69. The method of claim 3, wherein the formation of options phase includes the consolidation of all interpretations arrived at during the sensemaking phase into a “construct”, or grand interpretation.

70. The method of claim 3, wherein the formation of options phase includes the identification of many possible responses through the use of the focusing and integration methods used during the sensemaking phase.

71. The method of claim 3, wherein the evaluation of options phase includes the use of the focusing and integration methods used during the sensemaking phase.
72. The method of claim 3, wherein the evaluation of options phase includes the mapping of possible responses onto the goals and existing structures and processes of the organization or community.
73. The method of claim 3, wherein the response phase includes the construction of purposeful stories from the collected narrative material.
74. The method of claim 73, wherein the construction of purposeful stories includes the integration of participatory workshops including members of the given organization or community and isolated creation by method practitioners and/or co-discoverers.
75. The method of claim 74, wherein the construction of purposeful stories is guided by the use of a “narrative form”.
76. The method of claim 74, wherein the narrative forms include the “myth form”, in which the story contains a simple message and spreads rapidly because it reveals an essential truth.
77. The method of claim 74, wherein the narrative forms include the “fable form”, in which the story is complex and not easily remembered, yet contains a subtle subtext message that is internalized naturally.

78. The method of claim 74, wherein the narrative forms include the “virus form”, in which the story interacts with existing myths, either enhancing or reducing their power in the community.

79. The method of claim 74, wherein the narrative forms include the “archetype form”, a group of which stories represent emergent forces in the community and create a private symbolic language through which complex understandings can be quickly invoked.

80. The method of claim 74, wherein the narrative forms include the “disruptive metaphor form”, in which the combination of deep metaphorical similarity and surface-level dissimilarity disrupts assumptions and engenders multi-perspective thinking.

81. The method of claim 74, wherein the construction of purposeful stories is guided by the use of methods for general story improvement.

82. The method of claim 81, wherein the construction of purposeful stories is guided by the use of “actor realization”, or having actors play out improvisational skits based on purposeful stories.

83. The method of claims 81 or 82, wherein the construction of purposeful stories is guided by the use of “multiple retelling”, or refinement of stories through repeated tellings.

84. The method of claim 74, wherein the construction of purposeful stories is followed by the dissemination of those stories within and among the given organizations and communities.

85. The method of claim 84, wherein the method of story dissemination includes the performance of purposeful stories by actors or professional storytellers at community events or through media.

86. The method of claim 84, wherein the method of story dissemination includes the telling of purposeful stories by organization or community leaders at formal meetings and in casual settings.

87. The method of claim 83, wherein the organization or community leaders are trained in the techniques of oral storytelling so that they can subtly transmit the purposeful stories.

88. The method of claim 84, wherein the method of story dissemination includes the casual telling of purposeful stories by “dropping” them in community gathering places.

89. The method of claim 84, wherein the method of story dissemination includes the incorporation of purposeful stories into knowledge exchange resources such as intellectual capital management or knowledge management systems.

90. The method of claim 84, wherein the method of story dissemination includes the incorporation of purposeful stories into educational resources.

91. The method of claim 3, wherein the response phase includes the creation of repositories of narrative material for direct engagement by members of the organizations or communities.

92. The method of claim 91, wherein said narrative repositories make use of archetypal

elicitation methods to encourage people to talk about failures and embarrassing incidents as well as “success stories”.

93. The method of claim 91, wherein said narrative repositories make use of disruptive metaphor to move the discussion to a place where deep truths can be obliquely referenced.

94. The method of claim 91, wherein said narrative repositories make use of multi-perspective games to break up entrained thinking and encourage discourse around issues that might not otherwise be addressed.

95. The method of claim 91, wherein said narrative repositories make use of sensemaking models as aids to comprehension, navigation and reflection.

96. The method of claim 91, wherein said narrative repositories make use of the indexing of material through emergent characteristics derived from the organization itself.

97. The method of claim 91, wherein said repositories are designed to be used in knowledge transmission, with lessons learned, best practices, technical know-how, and other knowledge components.

98. The method of claim 91, wherein said repositories are designed to be used in oral and written history, with remembrance, reflection and dialogue among past, present and future members of the organization or community.

99. The method of claim 91, wherein said repositories are designed to be used in the induction of new members of the organization or community.

100. The method of claim 91, wherein said repositories are designed to be used in advanced decision support, where decision makers with little time (and possibly a restricted perspective) must have ready access to much complex and multi-perspective material.

101. The method of claim 3, wherein the response phase includes the creation of planning artifacts.